

*United States Marine Corps
Command and Staff College
Marine Corps University
2076 South Street
Marine Corps Combat Development Command
Quantico, Virginia 22134-5068*

MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

**U.S.-THAILAND RELATIONS:
ANALYSIS OF U.S. MILITARY SUPPORT TO THE KINGDOM OF THAILAND**

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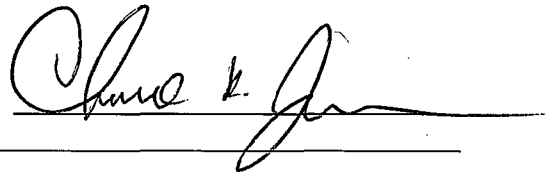
MAJOR B. CLEMENS

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Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member:

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Executive Summary

Title: U.S.-Thailand Relations: Analysis of U.S. Military Support to the Kingdom of Thailand

Author: Major B. Clemens, United States Marine Corps

Thesis: This paper provides a critical analysis and assessment of the adequacy and appropriateness of the current U.S. military support to the Kingdom of Thailand in light of recent events. These events include an increase in global and regional Islamic extremism and terrorism, Thailand's military coup in September 2006, and Thailand's enduring efforts to address the violence and insurgency movement in its southern and predominantly Malay-Muslim provinces.

Discussion: The assessment of the adequacy and appropriateness of current U.S. military support to Thailand was made by the author within the following contexts: (1) history of U.S.-Thai military relations up to the current Global War On Terrorism (GWOT); (2) current political crises within Thailand; (3) the history and root causes of the current southern conflict involving ethnic Malay-Muslims, insurgency, and Islamist terrorism; and (4) how the interests of the People's Republic of China currently relate to the Thailand situation and China's growing regional influence.

Conclusion: The U.S.-Thailand relationship remains vital to U.S. global and regional security and interests. Thailand is strategically located in Southeast Asia. Neighboring countries are struggling with varying degrees of civil and political unrest and while China continues emerging as a global power. The enduring relationship between Thailand and the U.S. has not weakened due to recent post-coup political turmoil and subsequent U.S. sanctions. In fact, the U.S. continued to maintain diplomatic and military ties with the Kingdom of Thailand throughout the crisis and successfully influenced a quick return to democratic rule. U.S. military aid provided to Thailand remains adequate and helps Thailand to maintain its own national security. However, the author does make recommendations that may further assist Thailand in combating domestic Islamist terrorism and ensure that the Kingdom remains capable of continuing its contributions to Southeast Asian regional security.

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DISCLAIMER

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Preface

The following thesis is a result of a personal interest obtained by the author while serving as a military operational planner and four-time COBRA GOLD exercise participant (to include the 1996 iteration while serving in Thailand's southernmost province of Narathiwat and the 2007 iteration). The planning and execution period of COBRA GOLD 2007 was marked by violence, terrorism, and political unrest in the Kingdom of Thailand. However, exercise planning continued and the U.S. elected to deploy military forces to participate in Cobra Gold 07 even while Thailand remained under the rule of a military junta.

This paper is a study of the origin and current strength of the U.S.-Thai relationship, the root of the ethnically and religiously charged violence in Thailand's southernmost provinces, the context of the political crisis that occurred during the aforementioned period, a brief overview of the Thai-Sino relationship, and a review of the military support provided to Thailand by the U.S. This study culminates in a determination made by the author of the adequacy of current U.S. military aid to Thailand and recommendations of how the U.S. can continue to assist and empower one of her most faithful partners.

It is in the author's view that the Kingdom of Thailand is strategically located and possesses a stable enough democracy that can allow it to positively influence its neighbors as well as emerging China. Thailand also, unfortunately, has the potential to become another front in a global effort to combat Islamist extremism and terrorism. An enduring U.S.-Thai relationship will be critical to the preservation of U.S. national and Southeast Asia regional security interests as well as to global security. This thesis represents the culmination of a year of learning that would not have been possible without LtCol Vincent Wawrzynski, LtCol Bryan Payne, Dr. Eric Shibuya, Dr. Paul Gelpi, the staff of the USMC Command and Staff College for Academic Year 2007-2008, and my mentor, Dr. Christopher Jasparro.

INTRODUCTION

For over 174 years the Kingdom of Thailand has remained a faithful ally of the United States. Thailand has been a key partner in maintaining regional stability and ensuring U.S. national and security interests are protected in Southeast Asia. Since the early twentieth century, the government of Thailand faced the challenge of quelling separatist violence in its southernmost provinces stemming from the Malay-Muslim “struggle for self-determination against Thai cultural and political subjugation.”¹ After years of relative calm in the 80’s and 90’s, the Thai Ministry of the Interior has recorded a significant escalation of violence since 2001 in its southern provinces. On September 19, 2006 political upheaval stemming from alleged corruption by Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and criticism of his handling of the uprising in the south culminated in a bloodless *coup d’etat* by a *military junta*.² Thailand’s democratically elected prime minister was ousted from power and forced into exile abroad; the junta then established martial law nationwide. This recent spike in violence and current political instability has forced the U.S. to reconsider its level of support to Thailand, and to reassess the significance of the nations’ longstanding relationship.

This paper will examine, in the light of recent events, two main questions. First, does the U.S.-Thailand relationship remain vital to U.S. global and regional security and interests; will it be weakened as a result of current events and subsequent U.S. sanctions? Second, is U.S. military aid provided via the National Security Strategy and U.S. Pacific Command’s (USPACOM) Theater Security Cooperation Program (TSCP) adequate to empower Thailand to maintain its own national security and allow it to continue to contribute to the regional security of Southeast Asia?

These questions will be examined within the following contexts: (1) history of U.S.-Thai relations up to the current Global War On Terrorism (GWOT); (2) the history and root causes of

the current southern conflict involving ethnic Malay-Muslims, insurgency, and Islamist terrorism; (3) an overview of Thailand's current political crises; (4) how the interests and growing regional influence of the People's Republic of China relate to Thailand; and finally, (5) an overview of current U.S. military support to Thailand.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF U.S.-THAILAND RELATIONS

"The U.S.-Thailand relationship boasts a long history, with diplomatic ties first established through the Treaty of Amity and Commerce in 1833³ during the administration of Andrew Jackson."⁴ "Ties between Thailand and the United States are multi-faceted and run deep. As one of our oldest and closest allies in East Asia, Thailand has maintained strong diplomatic relations with the United States for over 174 years."⁵ Throughout the Cold War period from the mid-1940s until the early 1990s, the relationship grew because Thailand was viewed as a key "front-line state in the war against communism; and as such, was privy to substantial U.S. military and development assistance."⁶ Despite criticism from its southeast Asian neighbors and being "accused of having abandoned their traditional independence or neutrality in foreign policy in favor of close identification and involvement with a single great power, the United States,"⁷ Thailand provided support for the build-up and basing of combat power to support the U.S. efforts throughout the Vietnam War. From installations within Thailand, "the United States carried on air operations against North Vietnam and Laos, including bombing and aerial reconnaissance and supply; conducted electronic warfare with signals jamming, electronic intelligence gathering, and radar surveillance; and sent ground teams covertly into Laos and beyond."⁸

The U.S.-Thai military relationship has endured and evolved since the Vietnam era. Thailand remains a vital contributor to U.S. national security interests and regional stability in Southeast Asia and has become a valuable ally in the “Long War” against global terrorism. “One of five treaty allies in Asia, Thailand hosts over 40 joint military exercises, provides crucial access to Thai facilities when needed, and has contributed troops to U.S.-led coalition operations. Thailand hosts Cobra Gold, our largest multi-national exercise in Asia, and, by so doing, allows us to engage with the Thai military, but also the militaries of Singapore, Japan, Indonesia, and others. Thailand has made critical contributions to the War on Terror, including allowing access to its airspace and bases for OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM and OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM as well as deploying military engineers and medical personnel to Iraq. Thailand permitted the United States to use Utapao Naval Air Station as the hub for relief operations in response to the December 26, 2004 tsunami that devastated the Indian Ocean region in Operation Unified Assistance.”⁹

The United States and Thailand have fostered an increasing and mutually beneficial economic relationship. Trade between the two nations reached an estimated \$30.6 billion in 2006 making Thailand the United States’ 20th largest trading partner. Meanwhile, U.S. foreign direct investment (FDI) in Thailand rose from \$7.6 billion in 2004 to \$8.6 billion in 2005.¹⁰ The U.S. is Thailand’s largest export market and third-largest importer after Japan and China.¹¹ In October 2003, President Bush visited Thailand, designated the country a Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA),¹² and entered into negotiations to establish a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) that continued into 2006. Following the military coup and subsequent dissolution of the Thai parliament, the U.S. suspended the FTA negotiations.

ROOT CAUSES OF THE CURRENT SOUTHERN CONFLICT

The current violence in southern Thailand centers on the four predominantly Muslim southernmost border provinces of Songkhla, Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat (see figures 1 and 2). This region was historically part of an independent Islamic sultanate known as Pattani. In 1902 it was annexed by Thailand, and became the southernmost tip of the Thai state. Then Thailand pursued a policy of forced assimilation of the area's ethnic Malay Muslims (who are the area's majority).¹³ Currently, up to 80 percent of the population of Thailand's four southernmost provinces are ethnic Malays and Muslims.¹⁴ An estimated 95 percent of the total population of Thailand is however, comprised of ethnic Thais adhering to Theravada Buddhism.¹⁵ The conflict is often characterized as one between Islamic education and Malay-Muslim cultural practices with the central Thai government and Buddhist chauvinism.

A separatist insurgent movement has continuously resurfaced at varying levels of intensity over the last hundred years in southern Thailand. A significant movement emerged in the 1970s and ended in 1980 when the insurgent leaders were granted amnesty by the central government. The next twenty years, however, were characterized by relative calm. The 1980s were marked by an acceptable level of violence by both movement members and local security forces while the 90s saw a "decline of military influence...and the institutionalization of parliamentary politics."¹⁶ The Thai Ministry of the Interior has recorded a significant escalation since 2001 of violence in the southern provinces, arguably triggered by a change in geopolitics and in the security structure of the southern Thai provinces initiated by the central government in Bangkok.

The leader of Thailand's central government during this escalation of violence was Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. Thaksin began his professional career as an officer in the Royal

Thai Police Department in 1973. In 1986 he established Advanced Info Service (AIS) which grew to become the largest mobile phone operator in Thailand and made Thaksin one of the richest people in Thailand. He entered the realm of politics in 1994. Renowned nationally as a highly successful entrepreneur, Thaksin won the prime ministry on February 9, 2001 on a platform that promised to use his experience to lead Thailand to economic recovery following the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997. He won a landslide re-election in 2005.¹⁷

“Thaksin was a staunch ally of the United States, and strongly supported the post-September 11 ‘war on terrorism’ declared by President George W. Bush. His decision to send a token contingent of Thai troops to Iraq infuriated Thailand’s Muslim population, especially in the South.”¹⁸ Even though Thailand militarily supported the GWOT effort, neither Thailand nor the U.S. linked the southern violence to it. During the Prime Minister’s meeting with President Bush in Washington, D.C. on September 19, 2005, Thaksin briefed the President on the situation at which time President Bush commended him for creating a National Reconciliation Commission in an attempt to quell the violence. The content and brevity of the dialogue exchanged between the two leaders served to underscore the acknowledgement by the U.S. that the violence in Thailand’s south was a domestic issue.¹⁹

OVERVIEW OF CURRENT POLITICAL CRISES IN THAILAND

The rising violence in Thailand’s south began placing considerable domestic and international pressure on Thailand’s central government to not only resolve the conflict but to adopt more peaceful means in their attempts. On January 5, 2004 Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra declared martial law in the provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala one day after insurgents raided a Thai military armory stealing over 100 rifles and killing four Thai soldiers.²⁰ Throughout 2004 several proposals were recommended by a diverse group of scholars and

academics and the Human Rights Commission, while a seven point peace proposal was submitted by Deputy Prime Minister Chaturon Chaisaeng to address the violence in Thailand's south peacefully. All the proposals were rejected by former Prime Minister Thaksin because he believed any concessions would promote further separatist movements and endanger Thailand's national security.²¹

Growing public and military criticism of Thaksin's hawkish handling of the uprising in the south combined with charges surfacing of alleged corruption throughout his regime led to political upheaval. The situation culminated in a bloodless military coup d'état on September 19, 2006 while Thaksin was in New York to meet with the U.N. General Assembly. Led by Army Chief General Sonthi Boonyaratglin, a military junta of Royal Thai Armed Forces (RTAF) generals seized power and created the *Council of Administrative Reform*, essentially a name for the military regime they established after suspending the nation's constitution. In a televised national press conference immediately following the coup, General Sonthi asked the Thai citizens to remain calm and patient and claimed the coup was "necessary to end intense conflicts in Thailand's society that Thaksin had created," eluding to the increased violence in the south, and that "Thaksin's policies had created serious rifts that needed to be healed."²² Sonthi also made it known that the coup received the endorsement of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the King of Thailand and constitutional monarch, and that the coup plotters had no intention of remaining in power.

Nine days after the coup, the U.S. State Department announced that sanctions against Thailand valued at almost \$24 million of assistance would be imposed under *Section 508* of the *Foreign Operations Appropriations Act* that states no funding, "shall be obligated or expended to finance directly any assistance to the government of any country whose duly elected head of government is deposed by military coup or decree."²³ This announcement was made in a formal

press briefing and specified suspension of Foreign Military Financing, International Military Education and Training (IMET) program funding, and Peacekeeping Operations and Section 1206 funds. "The United States continues to urge a rapid return to democratic rule and early elections in Thailand. We look forward to being able to reinstate these suspended programs after a democratically elected government takes office."²⁴ This pro-democracy rhetoric by the U.S. came as no surprise. The statement was intended to pressure and influence the junta and the Council for Democratic Reform (CDR) to quickly reestablish democratic civilian rule. In the months ahead the U.S. would have to strike a balance between distancing itself from a longstanding ally in order to send a pro-democracy message not only to Thailand's coup leadership but worldwide, and still provide enough support to ensure the maintenance of regional stability.

On December 23, 2007, fifteen months following the military coup, Thailand successfully held elections within the framework of its parliamentary democracy. The People's Power Party²⁵ won 228 seats, sufficient to win the election ahead of the Democrat Party²⁶ but short of the 241 seats needed for a majority of the 480-seat house. Samak Sundaravej was able to form a six-party coalition, however, gaining a parliamentary majority of about two-thirds. In a parliamentary vote on January 28, 2008, Samak Sundaravej was elected Prime Minister, receiving 310 votes against 163 for Abhisit Vejjajava of the Democrat Party. He was endorsed as Prime Minister by the king on the next day. On 6 February, His Majesty the King signed a royal command to endorse the new cabinet with Samak Sundaravej as both Prime Minister and Defense Minister, along with 35 other cabinet members.²⁷

CHINA'S INTERESTS IN THAILAND AND THAI-SINO RELATIONS

“Thailand's close relationship with China – arguably one of the closest in Southeast Asia – sits alongside an alliance relationship with the United States. Thailand, unsure of either China's ultimate reach as an emerging superpower or China's ultimate intentions toward the region, has set itself on a course where it hopes to accommodate China's rise.”²⁸ These words demonstrate why Thailand finds itself in a position where much is to be gained from strong relations with both the U.S. and China--two nations who have been closely monitoring each other's actions within the region.

In his article, “Cobra Gold Puts the U.S. In A Pickle,” retired U.S. Navy commander and current military and political analyst, John E. Carey discussed the impact of proposed U.S. suspension of military support of Thailand and the possibility of cancelling the 2007 iteration of COBRA GOLD. The thrust of the article was that the sanctions would provide opportunities for the PRC to utilize the current situation to expand their influence. “In the coming days the U.S. has a critical decision. It must go ahead with Cobra Gold or a scaled down co-operative military event with Thailand. Or it can punish Thailand by cancelling the event; which may push Thailand further into China's sphere of influence.”²⁹ In a separate article entitled, “The Big Picture in Asia,” Carey stated that while the U.S. imposed sanctions on Thailand following the coup, “China opened a more lively discussion of military matters with Thailand. Senior officials from Thailand have visited China and China is reciprocating. China also offered Thailand \$49 million worth of military aid and training.”³⁰

“Then, on January 22, 2007, China hosted the Thai Army Commander-in-Chief, the *Communist People's Daily* reported. ‘The Chinese army would like to promote friendly relations with the Thai army,’ Chinese Defense Minister Cao Gangchuan said in a meeting with Thai

Army Commander-in-Chief Sonthi Boonyaratkalin. To sweeten the deal, the Chinese put on the table a special assistance package that included US\$49 million worth of military aid and training. Beijing continued with visits to Thailand by several senior Chinese officials, mostly in the military and security fields.”³¹

According to Anthony L. Smith, then Associate Research Professor at the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, Hawaii, there are three main reasons that the Sino-Thai relationship is an enduring and strategically important one. “First of all, Thailand has no overlapping territorial claims with China. Second, Thailand's Chinese community has been well integrated into Thai society to the extent that the ethnic Chinese are not discriminated against in any way. On the contrary, Thais of ethnic Chinese ancestry are exceedingly well represented in the political, military and economic elite of the country. Third, Thailand is conscious of the reality of China's emerging power in the Asia Pacific region, and is keen to adjust to the inevitability of Beijing's economic and strategic reach into the region.”³² Thailand will undoubtedly continue to maintain and work to strengthen its relationships with both the U.S. and the PRC as it considers both to be vital to its national security interests.

OVERVIEW OF CURRENT U.S. MILITARY SUPPORT TO THAILAND

According to the U.S. Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism the roots of the conflict in southern Thailand, “...are ethnic and not religious, [but] there is concern that southern unrest has the potential to attract international terrorist groups such as JI and al-Qaida that may attempt to capitalize on the increasingly violent situation for their own purposes.”³³ In his article, “The Role of Foreign Trainers in Southern Thailand’s Insurgency,” Zachary Abuza asserts that although the Malay-Muslim insurgency in southern Thailand is “the most lethal in

Southeast Asia,” it is rarely referred to in the various media utilized by Jihadists, but “As the Thai insurgency drags on..., its profile will be raised in the consciousness of Muslims around the world, and it may attract more attention and funding.”³⁴ “The U.S. presence or even support for the Thai government is, nevertheless, minimal, even when compared to the presence of a small number of U.S. forces in Mindanao.”³⁵ Joseph Liow noted during his fieldwork in Pattani in August 2004 that Malay-Muslims were not only aware of prisoner abuse incidents at Abu Ghraib, but “were quick to draw parallels with the plight of Malay-Muslims at the hands of the Thai authorities in southern Thailand,” and were convinced of “an international conspiracy spearheaded by the Americans against Muslims throughout the world and, increasingly, in Southeast Asia as well.”³⁶ The threat posed by the situation in the south to Thailand’s political stability, the potential for the conflict to create regional unrest, and the possibility that JI and/or Al-Qaeda might open a new front provide strong reasons why continued support to one of our oldest allies is crucial.

Our nation’s most recent *National Security Strategy* of March 2006 begins: “It is the policy of the United States to seek and support democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world. In today’s world, the fundamental character of regimes matters as much as the distribution of power among them. The goal of our statecraft is to help create a world of democratic, well-governed states that can meet the needs of their citizens and conduct themselves responsibly in the international system. This is the best way to provide enduring security for the American people.”³⁷ “We will continue to prevent terrorists from exploiting ungoverned or under-governed areas as safehavens – secure spaces that allow our enemies to plan, organize, train, and prepare for operations.”³⁸ “We are building the capacity of foreign partners in all areas of counterterrorism activities, including

strengthening their ability to conduct law enforcement, intelligence, and military counterterrorism operations. Through the provision of training, equipment, and other assistance, the United States, along with a coalition of willing and able states and organizations, will enhance the ability of partners across the globe to attack and defeat terrorists, deny them funding and freedom of movement, secure their critical infrastructures, and deny terrorists access to WMD and safehavens. Ultimately, it will be essential for our partners to come together to facilitate appropriate international, regional, and local solutions to the challenges of terrorism.”³⁹

The United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) is the Hawaii-based combatant command responsible for security and stability in the Asia-Pacific region. USPACOM “employs a ‘cooperative engagement’ strategy “designed to deter aggression, promote peace, encourage prosperity and democratic ideals, and, if necessary, allow the U.S. to fight and win if a conflict cannot be avoided. Specifically, the strategy is a process of aggressively employing the means available to USPACOM (forces, assets, funds, and programs) in three principal ways: forward presence, strong alliances and friendships, and a visible demonstrated capacity for crisis response.”⁴⁰ Thailand is one of only five countries in the Asia-Pacific region with which the U.S. has a security alliance. This alliance provides for the conduct of several annual joint and combined exercises designed to train and enhance the ability of the Royal Thai Armed Forces (RTAF) to defend Thailand and respond to regional contingencies, as well as promote regional peace and stability.⁴¹ The largest of the exercises is the annual Thailand-U.S. co-sponsored COBRA GOLD exercise, which began in 1982 bilaterally and evolved into multi-national participation in 2000.⁴² The U.S. also provides funding for the professional development and training of Thai military and civilian personnel under the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program.

As previously noted, the U.S. temporarily suspended its financial assistance to the government of Thailand following the coup. However, and as illustrated in figure 3, \$4.2 million in military funding was maintained in the Fiscal Year 2007 budget in order to continue the support of three key initiatives, the Combating Terrorism Fellowship Program (CTFP), the IMET program, and Non-Security Assistance combatant command training and advisory assistance. The continued, albeit limited, U.S. military aid to Thailand throughout the controversial post-coup period is due to the valuable support Thailand has provided in maintaining regional security and in assisting in the GWOT effort.

“Thai troops have served in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as East Timor and Aceh. In the war on terrorism, Thailand captured Hambali, the operational chief of Jemaah Islamiyah and the Al Qaeda link to Southeast Asia, offered other key sensitive cooperation against priority targets, granted the U.S. overflight and landing privileges, cooperated closely on information sharing, and worked with the U.S. to curtail terrorist finance and to track and impede the movement of terrorists. Thailand also occupies strategic ground in the war on drugs. Thailand borders two of the world's three largest opium producers and is a market for Burmese methamphetamines. Thai and U.S. law enforcement and military units work together in the battle against drug smugglers.”⁴³

Thai military and law enforcement personnel also played key roles in the successful capture of Viktor Bout, the suspected international arms dealer, on March 7, 2008 in Bangkok while working with their U.S. counterparts in the Drug Enforcement Administration-led sting operation.⁴⁴

The Combating Terrorism Fellowship Program (CTFP) is a regional defense program that provides training and education necessary to help Thailand integrate its approach to combating terrorism. “This program brings together counterparts from different countries and

agencies across the counterterrorism (CT) spectrum. CTFP resources are used to engage the Royal Thai Government at the highest levels (such as the Director of the National Security Council) as well as at the decision-maker and action officer level.” The IMET program has been successful in developing and training the Thai military for successful participation in international peacekeeping operations. “Two U.S.-educated and trained Thai Generals served as UNTAET force commanders in East Timor. The Thai General serving as Deputy Chief of the EU-ASEAN Interim Monitoring Mission in Aceh is an IMET graduate.” Resident U.S. courses attended by Thai military personnel include command and general staff and service colleges, and courses in civil affairs, defense management, manpower management, information management, English language and instructor training, accounting, financial, and personnel officer training. These courses have “...traditionally provided an invaluable means to foster long-standing ties with the Thai military and to provide in-depth exposure to the U.S. system of civil-military relations, military law, and related issues.”⁴⁵

Although the U.S. suspended approximately \$24 million of military aid in response to the coup, it faced the possibility of international condemnation when the Public Affairs Section of the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok formally announced on April 26, 2007 that the United States would participate along with Singapore, Japan, and Indonesia in the annual COBRA GOLD exercise.⁴⁶ However subtle, this decision sent a strong message to the region and very likely to radical Islamic extremist groups of the U.S.’ commitment to Thailand.

The COBRA GOLD 07 exercise was tailored to include a joint-combined general officer level staff exercise focusing on academics and interoperability, Humanitarian Civil Assistance (HCA) civil-military projects, limited special forces training, and a field training exercise (FTX). The FTX was much smaller than in previous years because of Thailand’s military coup, but also due to the number of U.S. units and personnel deployed in support of OIF and OEF. The FTX

included a composite company-sized unit each from both the U.S. and Royal Thai Marine Corps (RTMC). The RTMC unit was preparing to conduct a scheduled deployment to southern Thailand later that year. The ten days of training focused on small arms live fire, demolition operations, convoy operations, and non-lethal weapons training. It also provided numerous opportunities for U.S. Marines to share with their Thai counterparts their personal experiences while deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan.⁴⁷

COBRA GOLD 08, scheduled to be conducted in May, will consist of approximately 5,250 Thai personnel and 6,075 U.S. forces, almost twice the number as last year. This year's exercise will focus on peacekeeping and, as stated by Thai General Songkitti Jaggabatara, "...will help Thai forces prepare for peacekeeping missions in Sudan." James Entwistle, the U.S. Embassy's deputy chief of mission in Bangkok, stated that the exercise was key to preparing for, "...multinational responses to future crises," and that "There is no better exercise than Cobra Gold in keeping our militaries ready to respond to the real-world priorities of supporting peace, stability, reconstruction and humanitarian assistance." The U.S. is expected to spend \$17 million to support COBRA GOLD 08 with Thailand spending approximately 14 million baht (\$444,000).⁴⁸

Most of the equipment that Thailand uses to support its military forces comes from the U.S. However, recent reports in Thai newspapers suggest that Thailand may begin turning to other countries for more of their military equipment needs. An article appearing in the *Bangkok Post* on March 17, 2008 entitled "Winds of Change" suggested that the U.S. suspension of military aid during the post-coup period prompted Thai leaders to consider alternate sources. The article stated that Thailand has been working to broker a deal with Sweden to provide the *Gripen* jet fighter aircraft as a replacement for its aging F-16 fleet and that "the Gripen deal underlined the need for Thailand to end the domination of military equipment from the US,

which is Thailand's key security ally.” It also quoted an independent security source, “The freeze in defence assistance after the coup was a factor. It made the top brass realise that it is time for diversification. The US ban was affecting the nation's security, its ability to defend itself. The temporary ban on defence aid definitely was a factor.”⁴⁹ However, this deal and a push to purchase armored vehicles from the Ukraine are receiving much scrutiny from the current Thai government because both were negotiated while General Surayud Chulanot was serving as interim prime minister following his appointment by General Sonthi following the military coup. Recent reports indicate that General Surayud’s cabinet used their 16-month tenure as an opportunity to increase military spending by as much as 24%.⁵⁰ A separate report appearing in *Jane’s Defense Weekly* indicates that Thailand has also demonstrated an interest in procuring the JF-17 light fighter aircraft which is being jointly developed by China and Pakistan.⁵¹

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE U.S. MILITARY ASSISTANCE

In the nearby Republic of the Philippines, a similar ethnically and religiously charged Islamic insurgency is being battled in that country’s south. Like Thailand, the Philippines also receives U.S. military assistance. However, what has proven to be one of the most effective means of empowering the Filipino military to successfully battle the insurgency has been the temporary basing of U.S. special forces personnel in Mindanao to conduct civil military operations and provide training in counterinsurgency tactics, techniques, and procedures. The methodologies utilized by the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P) for training and empowering indigenous military forces could be effective in expanding the training of the RTAF operating in southern Thailand as well.

Since the increase of violence in Thailand's south, the U.S. has focused its military presence and exercise participation to Thailand's central and northern regions. An important consideration in providing prolonged counterinsurgency training in Thailand will be to avoid any perception that U.S. forces are operating continuously in Thailand's southernmost provinces. It is therefore recommended that this U.S.-led counterinsurgency training be based and conducted in other parts of Thailand. To fight side by side with the Royal Thai Armed Forces in the southern provinces, in a struggle which is essentially and historically a domestic one, would likely exasperate the situation and contribute to regional instability. A major difference between the insurgent activities in the southern Philippines compared with those in southern Thailand is the proven presence of Jemaah Islamiya (JI) and Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) terrorist organizations and al-Qaida influence in the Philippines. There is still no credible evidence that links transnational terrorist organizations with the separatist movements in southern Thailand.⁵²

Currently under development by the Marine Corps is the Security Cooperation Marine Air-Ground Task Force (SC-MAGTF). According to Marine officials, this "new conceptual, pre-emptive strike force will take on general-purpose advisory roles that are now tasked to Army Special Forces units" and will contribute to the Marine Corps' strategy "for handling the 'long war' beyond Iraq and Afghanistan."⁵³ These SC-MAGTFs will be designed to operate in specific regions and will be integral to Phase Zero shaping operations by providing continuous and adaptive security assistance to "cooperative but less-developed" partner nations. A SC-MAGTF should possess the capabilities to employ techniques that have proven successful in operations by JSOTF-P. With a complement of personnel who possess regional language and cultural skills as well as experience in recent counterinsurgency operations, the SC-MAGTF will undoubtedly contribute to the development of Thailand's military capacity through training and the conduct of civil-military operations.⁵⁴ Operating within the Southeast Asia region, the SC-

MAGTF should prove to be a regional asset that will serve as a conflict deterrent, but will also likely help limit the extent of existing conflicts, particularly the containment of Thailand's southern insurgency.

By empowering and maintaining close military and diplomatic ties with our Thai ally, the U.S. remains poised to provide additional assistance as required. The enduring U.S.-Thai relationship serves as a strong deterrent from extremist groups such as al-Qaeda from utilizing the ethnic-political tensions in Thailand to further instigate the perpetrators and conduct insurgent recruiting, promoting and further expanding their cause in southeast Asia, and from utilizing the area as another insurgent training ground. It is important to solicit and maintain the support of our partners in the GWOT throughout the world. However, in the case of the Kingdom of Thailand, it is important to avoid portraying the violence in southern Thailand as being inextricably linked to GWOT. Doing so is likely to further help unite Islamist extremist groups worldwide while escalating or prolonging the violence, or further claims that the U.S. is supporting a war on Islam. The current military support strategy being employed by the U.S. in Thailand provides an effective balance by providing training particularly in the tactics, techniques, and procedures necessary to successfully conduct counterinsurgency operations, but without committing U.S. forces directly. The conflict between the government of Thailand and its ethnic Malay-Muslims must be resolved by the Thais themselves.

CONCLUSION

The U.S.-Thailand relationship remains vital to U.S., global, and Southeast Asia regional security and interests. There is no evidence to suggest that the longstanding partnership between our two nations was significantly weakened because of the temporary sanctions imposed against

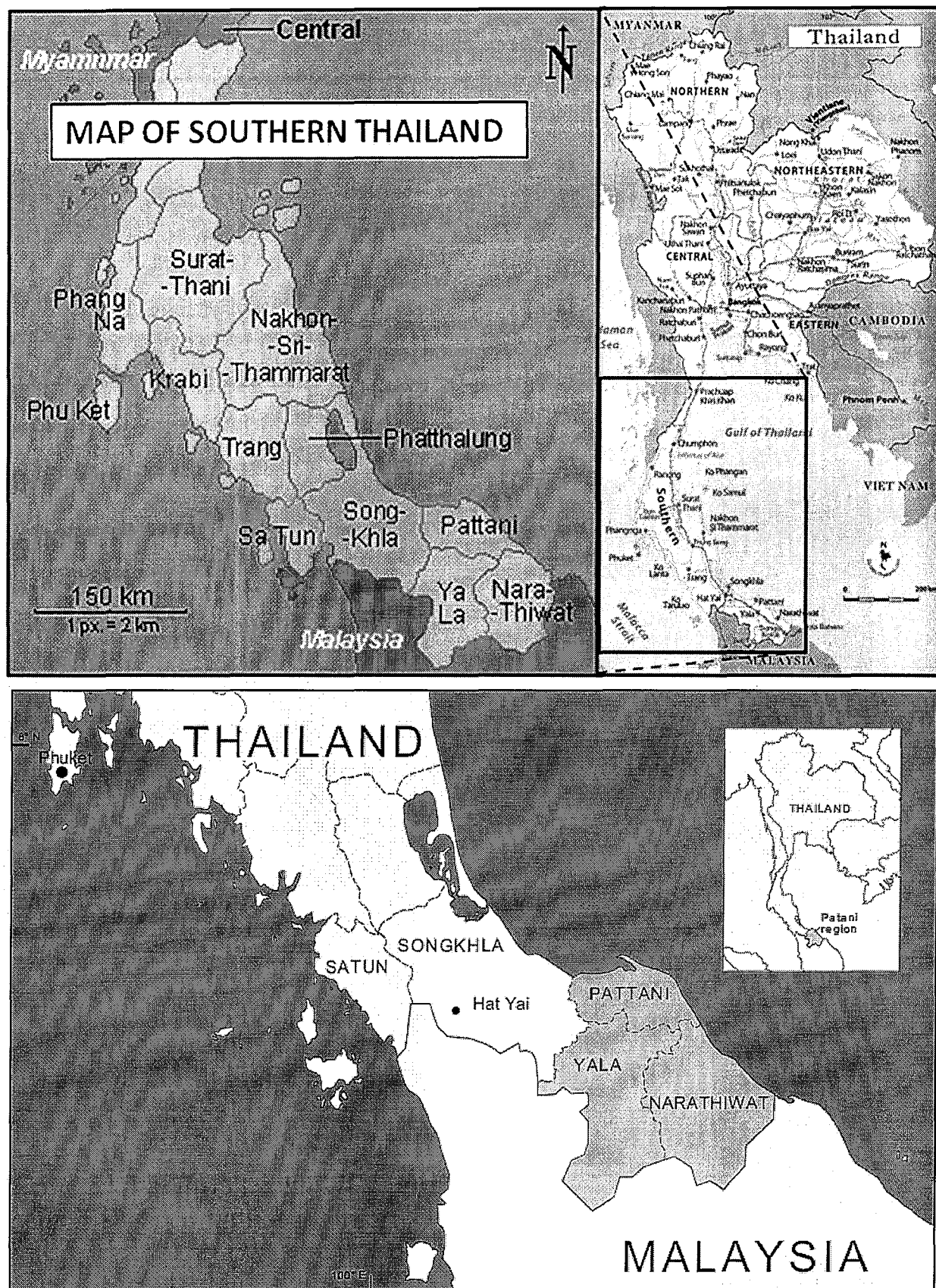
Thailand in between September 2006 and February 2008. Thailand's struggle to quell an Islamist insurgency in its southernmost provinces is a domestic issue and not necessarily an extension of the 'Long War' or a new front in combating global Islamic extremism. However, the U.S. should continue to stand firmly behind Thailand while it simultaneously struggles with domestic political issues. Providing military funding, training, and advising will empower Thailand to combat its insurgency and send a message that the U.S. and its allies will remain united in combating global terrorist networks. Furthermore, the U.S. military aid provided to the Kingdom of Thailand via the National Security Strategy and USPACOM's Theater Security Cooperation Program is adequate. By placing further emphasis on developing service capabilities that focus on regional operational culture, future initiatives such as the Marine Corps' Security Cooperation MAGTF, and sharing knowledge gained and lessons learned from operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Philippines; the U.S. will be able to make additional valuable contributions to the U.S.-Thailand partnership. This will continue to help Thailand maintain its own national security and remain a linchpin in maintaining Southeast Asian regional security. U.S. assistance also has and will continue to be a key factor in developing Thailand's ability to serve successfully in peacekeeping missions throughout the world.

On February 6, 2008 the U.S. State Department issued the following press release which normalized relations with Thailand and lifted sanctions,

"We congratulate Thailand's new cabinet on its inauguration, and the Thai people on their success in re-establishing an elected government. Deputy Secretary Negroponte has determined and certified to Congress that a democratically elected government has taken office in Thailand, removing legal restrictions on assistance to the Government of Thailand imposed following the September 2006 coup. We look forward to engaging

across a range of issues with Prime Minister Samak's government, in keeping with the proud history of our warm friendship and strong alliance.”⁵⁵

These words should serve to help usher in another 174 years of continued peace, prosperity, and cooperation between the United States and Thailand. From common democratic foundations, both the Kingdom of Thailand and the United States will continue to combat and deter both local and global extremism while their enduring partnership will contribute to the stability of the Southeast Asia region and beyond.



Figures 1⁵⁶ and 2⁵⁷. Maps of Southern Thailand, the Patani Region, and Thailand.

Program	FY 2006				FY 2007			
	Training Sessions	Individual Students	Course Count	Dollar Value	Training Sessions	Individual Students	Course Count	Dollar Value
CTFP	81	77	18	\$363,293	5	5	4	\$77,879
FMF	72	72	6	\$686,039	0	0	0	\$0.00
FMS	46	40	13	\$383,241	3	3	1	\$0.00
IMET	223	142	176	\$3,181,888	80	51	70	\$767,664
Misc DOD/DOS Non-SA	287	287	3	\$622,818	0	0	0	\$0.00
Non-SA, Combatant Command	221	221	3	\$369,556	45	45	3	\$1,010,000
PME Exchanges	26	26	2	\$96,814	0	0	0	\$0.00
Regional Centers	27	27	11	\$185,073	13	13	7	\$117,602
Service Academies	6	6	5	\$346,300	2	2	1	\$0.00
Totals:	989	898	235	\$6,235,025	148	119	86	\$1,973,145

Figure 3. U.S. Foreign Military Training to Thailand, Joint Report to Congress, Fiscal Years 2006 and 2007.⁵⁸

Notes

¹ Joseph Chinyong Liow, *Muslim Resistance in Southern Thailand and Southern Philippines: Religion, Ideology, and Politics* (Washington, D.C.: East-West Center, 2006), 24.

² A *military junta* is government by a committee of military leaders. The term derives from the Spanish *junta* meaning committee, specifically a board of directors. It originally referred to an executive body that came to power after a military coup in 20th century Latin America. Often it becomes a military dictatorship, though the terms are not synonymous. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_junta> (accessed February 16, 2008).

³ A *Treaty of Amity and Commerce* between the King of Siam (Kingdom of Thailand) and the United States of America (Mr. Edmund Roberts, American Envoy) was signed at Sia-Yuthia (Bangkok) on March 20, 1833. Ratifications were exchanged at Bangkok on April 14, 1836. Thailand was the first Asian nation to sign a treaty with the U.S. and established a diplomatic and commercial relationship between the two countries. <<http://www.thaiembdc.org/politics/thaius/1833tac.htm>> (accessed February 9, 2008).

⁴ John Brandon and Nancy Chen, editors, *Bilateral Conference on United States-Thailand Relations in the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: Asia Foundation, March 11-13, 2002), 1.

⁵ U.S. Department of State, Eric G. John, Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, *Statement before House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment: The Impact of Section 508 Sanctions on Thailand and Fiji: Helpful or Harmful to U.S. Relations?* (Washington, D.C., August 1, 2007) <<http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2007/89924.htm>> (accessed February 9, 2008).

⁶ Brandon and Chen, 1.

⁷ David K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History* (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkorm Books, 2003), 278.

⁸ Wyatt, 277.

⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Military Training: Joint Report to Congress, Fiscal Years 2006 and 2007*, (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, August 2007) <<http://www.state.gov/t/pm/rls/rpt/fmtrpt/2007/92078.htm>> (accessed February 6, 2008).

¹⁰ Office of the United States Trade Representative, Southeast Asia and Pacific: *Thailand Trade News*, <http://www.ustr.gov/World_Regions/Southeast_Asia_Pacific/Thail/Section_Index.html> (accessed February 10, 2008).

¹¹ Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook: Thailand." <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/th.html> (accessed March 30, 2008).

¹² *Major non-NATO ally (MNNA)* is a designation given by the United States government to exceptionally close allies who have close strategic working relationships with American forces but are not members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. While the MNNA status does not automatically include a mutual defense pact with the United States, it does confer a variety of military and financial advantages that otherwise are not obtainable by countries not in NATO. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Major_non-NATO_ally (accessed February 10, 2008).

¹³ Carin Zissis, "The Muslim Insurgency in Southern Thailand." Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). New York, February 1, 2007. http://www.cfr.org/publication/12531/muslim_insurgency_in_southern_thailand.html?breadcru mb=%2Fregion%2F290%2Fsoutheast_asia#3 (accessed March 7, 2008).

¹⁴ Liow, 25.

¹⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook: Thailand." <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/th.html> (accessed March 30, 2008).

¹⁶ Duncan McCargo, Editor, *Rethinking Thailand's Southern Violence* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2007), 4.

¹⁷ *Thaksin Shinawatra*, Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thaksin_Shinawatra (accessed March 19, 2008).

¹⁸ McCargo, 4.

¹⁹ U.S. Department of State, "Joint Statement Between President Bush and Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra." Under Secretary for Political Affairs, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs. (Washington, DC: Office of the Press Secretary, September 19, 2005). <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2005/53750.htm> (accessed April 6, 2008).

²⁰ *Thailand Islamic Insurgency*, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/thailand2.htm> (accessed February 18, 2008).

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²³ *Public Law 109–102 of Nov 14, 2005. Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2006. Military Coups, Section 508: “None of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available pursuant to this Act shall be obligated or expended to finance directly any assistance to the government of any country whose duly elected head of government is deposed by military coup or decree: *Provided*, That assistance may be resumed to such government if the President determines and certifies to the Committees on Appropriations that subsequent to the termination of assistance a democratically elected government has taken office: *Provided further*, That the provisions of this section shall not apply to assistance to promote democratic elections or public participation in democratic processes: *Provided further*, That funds made available pursuant to the previous provisos shall be subject to the regular notification procedures of the Committees on Appropriations.”*

<http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=109_cong_public_laws&docid=f:publ102.109> (accessed February 9, 2008).

²⁴ U.S. Department of State, Sean McCormack, Spokesman, *Transcript of Daily Press Briefing: Suspension of U.S. Assistance Programs* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Public Affairs, Press Relations Office, September 28, 2006).

<<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2006/73326.htm>> (accessed February 9, 2008).

²⁵ *The People’s Power Party (Palang Prachachon; PPP-Sanskrit Prajajan=People)* is a Thai political party founded on July 29, 2007. Its official ideology is center-left, liberalism, liberal democracy, populism. Its Party Leader is Samak Sundaravej; the Party Secretary General is Surapong Suebwonglee; and the Party Spokesperson is Kuthep Saikrajarng.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People%27s_Power_Party_%28Thailand%29> and <<http://www.ppp.or.th/index.asp>> (both websites accessed February 10, 2008).

²⁶ *The Democrat Party (Thai: Phak Prachathipat)* is Thailand’s oldest existing political party in Thailand and is considered the oldest probably in South East Asia as well. After the peaceful transition from an Absolute Monarchy to a Constitutional Democracy in 1932, the Democrat Party was founded on April 6, 1946 by a group of Members of Parliament (MPs). The name "Democrat" was chosen at the time of the party establishment in a similar manner to the Democrat Party of the U.S.A., which symbolized it as the political party of the working class and the poor. Since its inception, the ideologies of the Democrat Party have been to oppose all forms of dictatorship and to promote democracy for the people, and most importantly, by the people. The current party’s support bases concentrate on the middle and upper class population in Bangkok and voters in Southern Thailand. Up until the 2006 coup, it was the largest opposition party. The party upholds a royalist and conservative ideology, although after leader Abhisit Vejjajiva became party leader, it embraced many populist policies proved to be popular by the *Thai Rak Thai* party. Throughout the sixty years of the party existence, the Democrat Party has been led by seven distinguished and dedicated party leaders, three of whom served as prime minister. <http://www.democrat.or.th/democrat_english/history_eng.htm> (accessed April 13,

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<<http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=5505>> (accessed February 15, 2008).

³⁰ John E. Carey, "The Big Picture in Asia," *The Washington Times and Peace-and-Freedom.blogspot.com*, posted on February 18, 2007 <<http://peace-and-freedom.blogspot.com/search?q=cobra+gold>> (accessed February 16, 2008).

³¹ Carey, "Cobra Gold Puts the U.S. In A Pickle."

³² Smith, *Thailand's Security and the Sino-Thai Relationship*.

³³ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism: East Asia and Pacific Overview*, (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, April 30, 2007)
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³⁴ Zachary Abuza, "The Role of Foreign Trainers in Southern Thailand's Insurgency," *Terrorism Monitor: In-Depth Analysis of the War on Terror*, Volume 5, Issue 11 (Washington, D.C.: Global Terrorism Analysis, The Jamestown Foundation, June 7, 2007), 6.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Liow, 55.

³⁷ *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, (Washington, D.C.: The White House, March 16, 2006), 1.

³⁸ *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, September 2006), 16.

³⁹ Ibid, 19-20.

⁴⁰ *Cobra Gold*, <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/cobra-gold.htm>> (accessed February 10, 2008).

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Japan Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan 2007, White Paper, Part I: Security Environment Surrounding Japan, Chapter 2: National Defense Policies of Countries, Section 5: Southeast Asia* (Tokyo, Japan: January 9, 2007) <http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/index.html> (accessed February 10, 2008).

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⁴⁴ "'Most-Wanted' Arms Dealer Arrested in Thailand," *CNN.com/Asia*, (New York: CNN, March 7, 2008) <<http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/asiapcf/03/06/russian.arrest/index.html>> (accessed April 13, 2008).

⁴⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Military Training: Joint Report to Congress, Fiscal Years 2006 and 2007*.

⁴⁶ U.S. Department of State, Embassy of the United States, Bangkok, Thailand, *Cobra Gold 07 Press Release* (Bangkok, Thailand: #007/07, April 26, 2007) <<http://bangkok.usembassy.gov/news/press/2007/nrot007.html>> (accessed February 9, 2008).

⁴⁷ Personal experiences and recollection of the author. The author while assigned to Third Marine Logistics Group, III MEF as a G-3 Future Operations planner served as the unit's lead exercise planner for Cobra Gold 2007. He attended each of the combined planning conferences held in Hawaii and Bangkok and subsequently served as the Site Commander and the senior U.S. Marine at the Ban Chan Khrem (BCK) Royal Thai Marine Corps training base. BCK was the site of that year's successful U.S.-Thai combined field training exercise (FTX).

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